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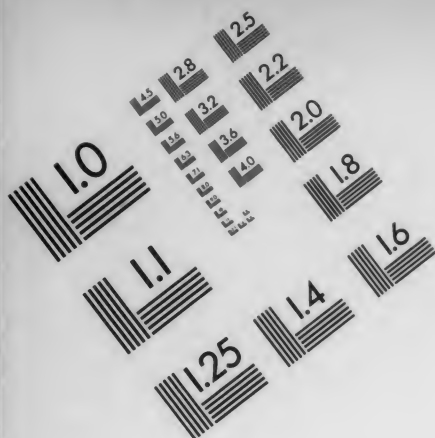
A paper read at the Philadelphia schoolmen's
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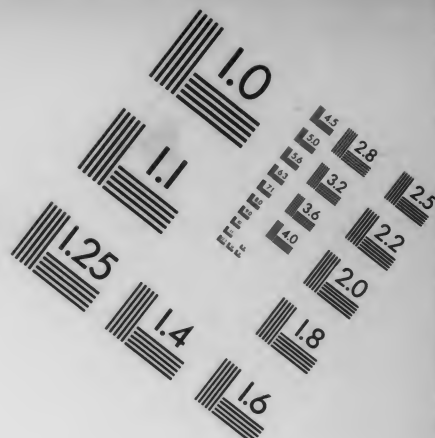
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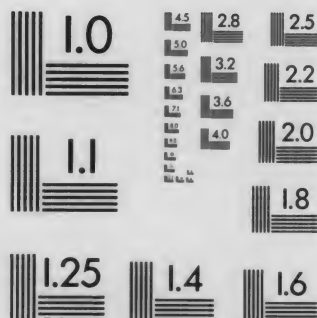
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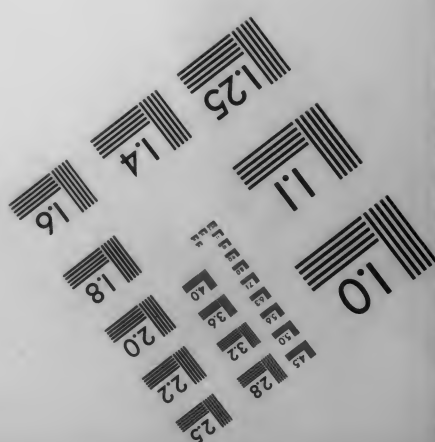
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SCIENTIFIC IDEALISM

SYDNEY T. SKIDMORE, SC. D.

SCHOOLMEN'S CLUB

PHILADELPHIA

1909

SCIENTIFIC IDEALISM

A Paper Read at the Philadelphia Schoolmen's Club
December 6, 1908

It has occurred to me, since a variety of interesting matters are discussed in the Schoolmen's Club from time to time, that it would not be inappropriate on one evening to direct attention to some developing aspects of philosophy which have not, as yet, been generally discussed and therefore are not broadly understood. Only those whose attentive interest is fixed on the matter realize the transfiguration of the world's basic thinking while it is in progress. It is too silent, gradual, and all surrounding, to be appreciated or even perceived. It is like a flower, evident to all when in bloom, while the process of blooming is imperceptible.

The splendid researches in ultra physics during the past quarter century which must forever glorify the names of Crooks, Hertz, Lodge, Becquerel, J. J. Thompson, the Curies, with two or three score ardent coadjutors, and backed by the previous projections of Faraday, Kelvin, Maxwell, Helmholtz, et al., are reconstructing the sciences of physics and chemistry, and they are doing vastly more than that, for they are leaving the former limitations and ultimates of speculative philosophy far afield, while sending a strong searchlight forward into realms of hitherto intellectual shadow and transfusing with new illumination an ancient doctrine that has long stood among the vagaries of that gloom.

This has been the result of special method and insistent quest. Their course has been directly opposite to that of the pragmatist. They have dealt with matter and material phenomena, but, being confronted by these, they have not

inquired, What are you good for, or whither tending? Their incessant questioning has been, What art thou? From what unknown elements of being do you come? To what unrevealed antecedent are you related?

With refined devices and exquisite ingenuity they have racked the witnesses and compelled them to yield their secrets. The unvarying trend has been towards the occult and supersensible; otherwise this paper would be without logical substance. It may be aptly described as a process of discarnation; an apotheosis of matter. As Mr. Balfour said some time ago: "Matter is being explained by explaining it away." Speculative idealism is almost as old as the world, but scientific idealism is of our own time, and still so young that it has hardly as yet learned to talk or formed its vocabulary.

We have practically reached the genesis of matter—its *quid*, although its *quomodo* may be long delayed, and, without leaving the lines, the course is still onward towards the genesis of thought. From body, a sensible unit of matter, knowledge has extended until it comprehended the molecule, a subsensible unit of matter; thence to the atom, a rationalized quantitative unit containing only the potentiality of matter, and now the atom has been resolved into electrons, which are purely focal points of energy, with the still more subtle energy components of radiancy yet to be apprehended. Beyond the realm of sense, matter is both actually and potentially non-existent, and there is nothing out of which materialism can construct a valid title to philosophy, while in philosophy the effort should be continually to eliminate or correct the mistakes and delusions that materialism injects into it.

The work of ultra physicists arrests attention because it is with us; it is in the mental air; but it is only the present part and grandest culmination as yet of what has been going on for a long time. One of the most interesting things to note in the history of science has been the passing, one after another, of the "subtle fluids." Everything when followed

beyond the verges of material recognition has been conceived to be a "subtle fluid." Such was the soul of man; the spirits in bodies with which the alchemists wrestled; the phlogiston of Stahl; the corpusculum of Newton; the electricity of Symmer and Franklin; and the ether of Huygens. The "subtle fluid" in each case was but the materialistic clasp with which the tentacles of the human mind comprehended the thing. They were not subtle fluids at all; they are now known to be energy modalities, and the consummating stroke is the resolving of the atom to the electron, likewise an energy mode. With the resolution of all things to focal points of energy thought draws nearer to the ultimate genesis and the human mind effects a close cognized juncturing with its universal self.

Energy is one of the names that we give to the Absolute or Unconditioned. "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God,'" and the fool philosopher has said in his book "There is no Absolute." But there is, and as that Absolute reacts upon our minds or feelings in different ways we give to it different names. Taking this up somewhat in detail, thought reverts to the old, old, mysterious attractions of gravitation, electricity and magnetism. These must ever be explained in accordance with the philosophical basis of the age, and its fundamental concepts of being. This has mostly been that of a discontinuity universe; a jumble of separately distinct entities; mind, matter, creature, creator, space and time, which, energetically endowed, react on each other and hence arises all things.

Out of such a philosophy but one explanation could come. Whenever two bodies are mutually affected by gravitation, electricity, or magnetism, they manifest either an attraction or aversion for each other. They therefore must exert a force on each other across the intervening space; but action at a distance is disallowed by all known laws and modes of force and so, philosophical discontinuity and mechanical logic have stood facing each other at antagonistic gaze and with mutual astonishment, like the two Dromios. This and myriads of

paradoxes become cleaned out of the mental sky when the materialistic attempt to explain being by rationalizing the combines and interdependencies of sensation products is abandoned and thinking follows the lines of scientific idealism to their inevitable focus in a single universal entity which is the sole substance of all things.

This substance evolves in ideas and such evolving is creation. Creation is exclusively a mental and not at all a materialistic process. This truth is generally ignored or lost from sight, although it is distinctly affirmed in the second chapter of Genesis. "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth in the day that the Lord made the earth and the heavens and every plant of the field *before it was in the earth* and every herb of the field *before it grew*." In creation the primal substance eventuates in Ideas and Ideas are the real things. They are the eternal verities. Only such ideas as are sensed become invested with that sense garb which we call matter, and when, in pure intellectual vision, matter is pursued beyond the limits and constructions of sensation, as is being done at present by the ultra physicists, its materiality sloughs off and vanishes.

Furthermore as to the primal Entity. Our first concept of it is that of Allness, but by reason of human limitations we are not able to bring this pure conception to a true birth. Instead of that, it issues from the womb of thought as a mongrel litter. To us the Allness appears not simple, but of different kinds and so, from the nature of our apprehension, an artificial order of differences appears, which does not exist in the thing itself. In this, as in everything else, the purity of the concept is dependent on the extent to which these differences can be correlated or subdued. To clarify a muddy flux of variant facts and confused thoughts to a transparent principle, clear as crystal, is ever and always the supremest effort and the supremest triumph of mind.

The different kinds of Allness are somewhat differently apprehended and phrased by the religionist and by the philosopher, and parenthetically it may be well to say that I

understand a religionist to be one who contemplates his individual relations and those of his kind to the Entity, and a philosopher is he who contemplates the Entity itself as unaffected by such relations. To the religionist in whatsoever way apprehended, it is God. To the scientific idealist in whatsoever way apprehended, it is Mind. The differences of the Allness which, in philosophy as I have stated, are only differences of mental mode in ourselves and do not exist beyond the limits of our own thinking, the religionist construes as attributes pertaining to the entity itself and sees, in the universal, that reflection of himself which makes for personality there and a discontinuity universe everywhere. To avoid as much as possible the verbal wrangle that must ensue when a single term is applied to the same thing as seen from different view-points, the terminology has been happily made somewhat different in theology and philosophy.

To particularize somewhat:—There is an allness of *Duration*. In theology this is Eternescence, in philosophy Persistence. There is an allness of *Efficiency*. In theology this is Omnipotence, in philosophy it is Energy. There is an allness of *Imminence*. In theology this is Omnipresence, in philosophy it is provisionally called Ether. There is an allness of *Knowledge*. In theology this is Omniscience, in philosophy the same term. There is an allness of *Knowing* or wisting. In theology this is also Omniscience, in philosophy it is Consciousness.

These are some of the undifferentiated evolutes or ideas of primal substance and they engage our thinking because we differentiate them in our finite apprehendings of them. And such apprehendings establish directions which extend far beyond vision or ken. We have another set of terms which apply to these finite apprehendings. We divide persistence into finite units and to so much of the series as we cognize we apply the term time. It takes the form of a series or succession because two finites cannot co-exist; they would instantly slip from their limits into infinity. Likewise, if I may be allowed to coin a word, we *finitize* Energy. We fix

it within resistive limits and then name it force. We finitize Ether and it becomes to us quantity, form and place. We finitize Consciousness and it becomes personality. Generically, we finitize Mind and it becomes the psychic organon, the human mind. Now these finitized excerpts of universal ideas, viz.: time, force, quantity, form, locus, personality and psyche, are all contained in human being and so it becomes affirmed that that being in its ultimate elements is a finitized image or likeness of the Universal Entity.

Such is the idealistic frame or setting of the leads of science. Can it be supposed that having attained the electron with the Alpha or X-ray emanation still unattained, that science will stop with either of those; or that it will stop at any thing short of the ultimate limit of finiteness? To this I apply the term "*moment*," because we have no other term that so nearly fits, and since that term is used so variously I will define this present use of it. It is a point in the blend of Persistence, Energy, Ether, Intelligence, and Consciousness:—A point in the blend of universal ideation or Universal Mind. This is the goal of science. From this it can synthesize a knowledge of the universe.

One of the foremost subjects in the science of the future will be the *psyche*. That there shall be a science of it when science shall have resolved sufficiently the secrets of general being to create it there can be no doubt. At present we have none. When attained it will not be by the method of the statistician; a vain effort to distil a principle from an impossible digest of innumerable and undigestible facts: Nor yet that of the pragmatist who seeks the parent lode by following the trail of sensuous comforts and utilities and the constructive agencies in social institutionalism. It will not be by any species of symptomology. What stranger could know a place by making a category at a distance, of the various roads that lead out of it and noting that one is sandy, another rocky, another muddy, one straight, another crooked, etc., or who ever discovered the bacillus of a disease from symptoms? If known at all it can only be so when seen directly by a

sufficiently magnified and clarified vision. A skilled microscopist does not see it by looking at sick people.

The special moment or ultimate unit of the psyche, science has not yet attained and, until it does attain it, only speculative lines can be followed, and speculative idealism is to scientific idealism what the preëmption of territory is to its subsequent occupancy. Whenever at any particular moment or point in Universal Mind there arises the ability to distinguish itself from others, to differentiate in the least degree the self from the not self, there is the birthing of personality; the dawn of the finitizing psyche. There is no curdling of nature in this; no precipitation of essence, only a cognizing of Universal ideas in a limited mode and these cognizances become the elements of its finite being. It is thus that it acquires continuance, time, force, form, place, knowledge, and self-consciousness all *from itself*.

I am entirely aware that to many what I have just stated must seem meaningless. At this point the difficulty of intelligible discussion becomes enormous because we are accustomed, not only to speak, but also to think in materialistic terms; in terms of subject and predicate, of actor and actee. This that I was saying becomes intelligible only when ideas stand forth in the mind as the only veritable things and concretes are merely sense derivatives in which cause and effect are factoring. Ideas do not belong to that order at all. They are of the primal substance, self-originating and self-finitizing. They are not consequent, as there is nothing which bears to them the relation of antecedent. It may be noted that the psyche has the same genesis in all, but its development in different ones show wide differences of extensiveness. Personalities differ because of unequal rates and extent of growth in their different orders of ideation. They get their apprehensiveness from the original psychic moment and extend and correlate their apprehendings nearer or farther in different cases without in any wise setting up something different from primal substance. Through each and all the Universal Mind maintains unbroken continuity, incessant

imminence. This is what I understand to be that which the philosophers and poets of the Universal endeavor to express. Emerson, whose thought lived so much in the interrelation of the human with the Universal and the expression of the Universal in the human, is unreadable in the light of any other understanding. In his own language:

"Nothing is great or small
To the Spirit that knoweth all.
And, where it cometh, all things are,
And it cometh everywhere."

The aim of this paper, whether attained or not, has been to set forth one indisputable fact. Science is endowing the mystical language of idealism with a content and giving to it an expressible meaning. It is doing this by eliminating, more and more, from human understanding, notions of a discontinuity universe derived from sensory interpretation, and by creating a facility of rigid thought habit in the realm of the supersensible. There was not the faintest response from science to the ideas of Plato or the atoms of Lucretius, but with the ideas of Hegel and the atoms of Dalton science is very busy. The reason is that the former were far away ethereal visions that unified nothing, the latter are constructing fluxes in which wide diversities of impression judgments fuse and flow into singleness. Each step forward in science uncovers a new set of more subtle and widely extended sympathies which have been latent in being heretofore, and sympathy threads the lines that run through unity. Science is withdrawing from dream and establishing in reason the conviction that we are finitized portions of illimitable essence and everything pertaining to that essence is potentially present in us. Development, growth, is the extension of consciousness to new accessions or increments of the hitherto unclaimed self. We do not evolve from externality; there is no such thing, and that intellectualization which we term externality evolves from us. This is idealism, and with the added confirmatory trend of science it becomes scientific idealism. It stands in perfect contradiction to the doctrines that mind is a fabri-

cated product, a resultant phenomenon, a brain functioning, and without essential substance or, at most, a blank impotent negation, a "tabula rasa" or lantern screen, on which neurotic affection projects the images of the external world and elaborates them into all forms of mentation products. Such philosophizing, aside from its inadequacy, is a genuine spiritual obscurant, and from its fundamentals of being can only develop a cultus that is thoroughly sensuous. It is easy to teach, easy to grasp, and so its evil potencies become attractive. It offers to its devotee, like the tempter on the mount, all the kingdoms of knowledge when it does not own one of them. It is the veritable scarlet woman of philosophy who has defiled the courses of modern thinking and perverted modern education with her abominations.

DISCUSSIONS

The appended discussion followed the reading of the paper. For greater exactness the points or questions, by request, were afterward submitted in writing and the answers are either such as were given at the time or are deducible from the matter in the paper. The members who participated in the discussion were Messrs. Gideon, Gerson, Coulomb, Ballentine, Michener and Sayre.

Will philosophy or science ever be able to determine the essence of Mind any more than the essence of God, since they are identical?

No; to determine is to fix limits, and philosophy scientifically guided can never seek to determine Primal Entity because it posits it fundamentally as undeterminate—i. e., without limits.

The psychology of to-day is concerned with the manifestations rather than the essence of Mind. What will be the scope and purpose of the new psychology?

All psychology must have concern with the manifestations of mind. Psychic theorists differ in their use of the manifestations. Scientific idealism seeks to know the psyche in order that it may interpret the manifestations; empiricism seeks the manifestations in order to understand the psyche.

Does not Scientific Idealism which regards everything as a manifestation of mind require the acceptance of Pantheism, since it regards Mind and God as identical?

Pantheism is a theological term of wide and varied significance. The different meanings which attach to it are contained in the historic evolution of religious beliefs. It is not a reference or usable term in philosophy.

Professor, I understood you to speak of the possibility of some day discovering or getting a knowledge of the laws (methods of operation) of mind from this ideal point of view. Would you be willing to venture a prediction as to the method or means by which such knowledge might come or be brought about?

The language of the paper evidently did not fully convey my meaning. In current psychology too much emphasis is given to "laws of mind," as though the psyche, like a solar system, works mechanically in ways that are predetermined and can be formulated. It is determining and not determined in its modes; if it has laws, they are those that pertain to spontaneity. It is resident in personality, in which it is limited, finitized. What we gain apperceptively, and all that we gain from the facts of personality, is a knowledge of its boundary limitations and not a knowledge of it. This latter can only come when the focus or radiant in absolute Mind from which it extends is apprehended. Toward this the course of Scientific Idealism is directed, but what sequence of units in the way thereunto must first be scientifically clasped or as to when or how the initial moment of the psyche shall be attained no prediction can now be made.

Later on, in discussing the idea of "Otherness" as a functioning of the "oneness" of the Absolute, I said: "Would it not be possible to think of this otherness as being in a way comparable to the physicist's theory of a vortex within the mass of a fluid? Such a vortex is separate and marked off from the rest of the fluid, and yet is a unit with it."

It is possible and proper enough to employ the vortex as a mode of thought, but care must be taken to preserve it as a similitude and not erect it into a tenet or a fact. The subtle fluids have passed. They are now only scientific chestnuts, and of course the vortex had to go with them. Lord Kelvin was about the last one of great thinkers to hold seriously to the doctrine.

Is it wise or even possible for a finite mind to say anything for or against an Absolute? The term does not seem to connote a conceivable entity.

Yes; if by an absolving process the finite mind is continually extending its concepts, it is possible and wise to reason concerning the ultimate of that process. Because men cannot reduce the Infinite to

finiteness, they are not forbidden to reverse the process. No necessity affirms that they may not extend to the Infinite.

*"Nor see the genius of the whole
Ascendant in the private soul."*

Does not the being of an Absolute and of something created by or emanating from it involve a contradiction from which we cannot mentally escape?

It certainly does if the Absolute appears to the mind as an author, artificer, or parent from which the issue passes into separateness or withdrawn existence. The Absolute consists, it does not exist; there is no *ex* to it, nor does existence pertain to it in any way; through Allness it has unbroken continuity, incessant imminence; nothing is created by it or emanates from it that is separate from itself; in it all things "live and move and have their being."

Is not the doctrine of this paper the same as that of the Eleatics who asserted that the Universe is One and that plurality is a deception of the senses?

Yes, as to the first clause very similar, but as to the second clause interpretation is necessary. Much turns on the meaning of the word "deception." Because the primal essence of the Universe is unexistent, the Eleatics were led by their logic to deny the possibility of existence. Being with them meant only essential truth, and must be affirmed equally by all tenses of the verb to be, all phenomena, all phase as merely existent was consequently non-being, nothing. Scientific Idealism is widely different from this; there is a being of the real and likewise a being of the seeming; the real was, is, and forever will be, immutable truth; the seeming was not, is now, and will not be; it is not Truth because discontinuous, but trueness is affirmed of it in virtue of its present being. The deception of the senses results from substituting for Truth that which is merely a psychic product and a cataclasm in logic ensues whenever a term to which a dual meaning is thus attached is used indiscriminately in constructive reasoning.

If finitizing began when the Absolute thought of self and other than self, was there a division of the Infinite or a creation of the finite? If Infinity divides itself, does it remain infinite? If the finite was a new existence, out of what was it created? Did the finite exist in any sense before this creative act of the Infinite? If so, was it not infinite and finite at the same time? If absolutely created, was it not something and nothing at the same time?

Since these questions are somewhat plicative I will attempt to answer them collectively. With the Absolute there can be no thought of self and other than self; such thinking belongs only to the finite. The Absolute is not divided because a finitizing process occurs in it; it cannot fractionalize, for it is indivisible; the finite is not created

out of anything, it is a limiting mode of that which abides in infinite Mind, and eternally so as Idea. If we reason concerning the Absolute it must be in terms of the universal. It is the same thing in philosophy that infinity is in mathematics; one involves no greater or lesser departure from rudimentary modes of thought derived from immediate experience than the other, yet who would apply the same quality of test to mathematical infinity as is applied to philosophical Absolute, or how far could mathematical reasoning extend if infinity should be dismissed from it with the same degree of contempt as is the Absolute by pragmatic writers and agnostics?





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